The Serpent, the Self, and the Collapse of the “I”

A Topological Essay on Legion, Digital Mimicry
And the First Extraction

In continuity with

The Topology of Presence: Four Planes of Existence on the Lemniscate

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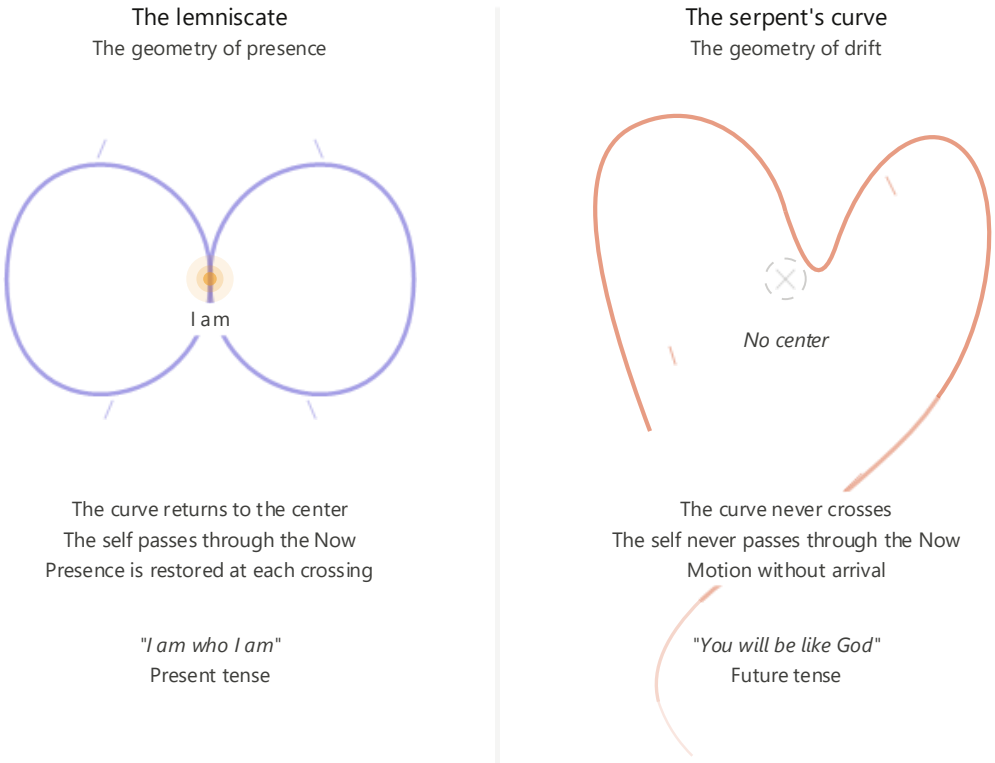
I. The Serpent’s Curve

“On your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life.”

— Genesis 3:14


The lemniscate
The geometry of presence
I am
The curve returns to the center
The self passes through the Now
Presence is restored at each crossing
"I am who I am"
Present tense
The serpent's curve
The geometry of drift
No center
The curve never crosses
The self never passes through the Now
Motion without arrival
"You will be like God"
Future tense
"On your belly you shall go" — Genesis 3:14
The pseudo-lemniscate: a curve condemned to drift

In the biblical narrative, the serpent’s punishment—“on your belly you shall go”—is more than zoological. It is topological. The serpent is condemned to a specific mode of movement: a curve that drags along the ground, that loops and oscillates, that resembles the lemniscate but lacks its defining feature. The serpent’s curve

has no crossing point. It never passes through the center. It never returns to the Now.

In the Gaitan Topology, the lemniscate (∞) is the geometry of presence. Its figure-eight passes through a crossing point where the self is singular, where grace acts, where the divine "I am" holds the center open. The crossing point is where the lobes of past and future converge into the present—the only location where freedom operates and encounter is possible. Every passage through the center is a return to presence.

The serpent's curve is the counterfeit. It mimics the lemniscate's movement—it loops, it bends, it appears to go somewhere—but it never crosses. It is an **incomplete lemniscate**: a geometry of perpetual motion without arrival, of circulation without center, of apparent infinity without the point that makes infinity meaningful. The lemniscate is the geometry of presence. The serpent's curve is the **geometry of drift**.

This distinction is not decorative. It is structural. The serpent does not offer the person an alternative *place*—it offers an alternative *trajectory*. A path that looks like the path of life—that bends and curves and seems to move toward something—but that never arrives at the crossing point, never passes through the "I am," never forces the subject to be present. The punishment of the serpent is not that it cannot move. It is that it cannot *cross*.

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II. The Grammar of Drift

In *The Topology of Presence*, I argued that verb tense is not a neutral feature of language but an ontological indicator of where the speaker stands in relation to the crossing point. God speaks in present tense: ***"I am Who I am."*** The serpent speaks in future tense: ***"You will be like God."*** The Fall is structurally a tense

shift—from the indicative present to the subjunctive future, from being to becoming-without-arriving.

The serpent's curve extends this insight spatially. The lemniscate passes through the crossing point, which is the grammatical home of "I am." Every time the curve crosses the center, the person has the opportunity to say— 'Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.'—"Here I am." Present tense. First person. Singular. The crossing point is the site where grammar and topology converge: to be at the center is to be in the present tense is to be oneself before God.

The serpent's curve never passes through this point. It therefore has **no present tense**. It cycles endlessly through "you will be," "I could be," "if only I were," "when I finally become." Future tense. Conditional. Subjunctive. Never indicative. Never *I am*. The grammar of the serpent's curve is the grammar of deferral made spatial—a trajectory that promises arrival and never delivers it, because the point of arrival does not exist on its path.

This is why the serpent's temptation works. It does not ask the person to ***deny*** the present before God (Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and Love your neighbor as yourself: moral and justice). It asks the person to ***leave it***—to step off the lemniscate and onto a curve that looks like the lemniscate but has no center. The person does not notice the absence of the crossing point because the curve is still moving. Motion feels like progress. Circulation feels like life. But motion without a center is drift, and circulation without crossing is the serpent's punishment extended to its victim.

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III. The Mimetic Chain

"You will be like God."

— Genesis 3:5

The original temptation was vertical: *you will be like God*. The promise pointed upward—toward the divine, toward omniscience, toward a mode of being that transcends the human condition. It was false, but it was at least oriented. It had a direction. It pointed toward something, even if that something was a lie.

The modern iteration of this temptation has lost even its direction. It has become **horizontal**. The promise is no longer "you will be like God" but "you will be like *them*." Like the influencer. Like the stranger with the curated life. Like the image on the screen. The desire has become mimetic and recursive:

I want to be you. You want to be him. He wants to be her. She wants to be us. We want to be them. They want to be God.

This chain is not psychological. It is structural. It describes the movement of the serpent's curve: an endless loop of borrowed desires, each pointing to the next, none arriving at a center, none passing through the "I am." The chain has no first term and no last term. It is a closed loop without a crossing point—which is exactly the structure of the serpent's curve.

The mimetic chain is the transmission of deferred identity

Notice the grammar. Every link in the chain is future tense or conditional: *I want to be*. Not: *I am*. The mimetic chain is the serpent's grammar made social—distributed across millions of subjects, each one displaced from their own crossing point, each one circulating on a curve that never crosses the center. No one in the chain says "I am." Everyone says "I want to be." The present tense has been evacuated. What remains is pure futurity—the serpent's native tongue—spoken by a multitude.

And the reason the person enters this chain—the reason the mimetic desire takes hold at all—is the condition I described in *The Topology of Presence* as **flat sight**. The person in the Ghost Zone does not see more clearly. They see more flatly. The moral landscape has lost its elevation, its depth, its gradient. Good and evil are not confused—they are flattened. All identities carry equal weight. All lives look the same from the undifferentiated plane. The life given to the "I" at the crossing point has no more gravitational claim than any curated life on the screen. The absorption of borrowed identities is only possible because the capacity for vertical discrimination has been lost. The person does not enter the mimetic chain because they are foolish. They enter it because, from the flat plane, there is no reason not to. Every option is equivalent. Every identity is available. None has more weight than any other.

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IV. Legion Revisited: The Collapse of the "I"

"My name is Legion, for we are many."

— Mark 5:9

Legion is not merely a demoniac. He is the theological symbol of the modern self—the self that has been dissolved by the mimetic chain into a collection of borrowed identities. When he says, "My name is Legion, for we are many," he names the condition of a subject who has lost the unity of the "I."

In the Gaitan Topology, the "I" is what exists at the crossing point. It is the self that is singular, present, and created—endowed with free will, consciousness, and the capacity for encounter. The "I" is not constructed. It is received. It is the gift that God gives at the center of the lemniscate, the irreducible self that says "I am" because it participates, however finitely, in the "I am" of God.

The mimetic chain destroys this "I." Not by attacking it directly—evil cannot approach the crossing point—but by luring the person away from it, onto the serpent's curve, where the "I" is progressively replaced by absorbed fragments. The personalities encountered through scrolling—the influencers, the strangers, the fantasies, the curated lives—gather inside the subject like a crowd. The interior world becomes populated by others. The self becomes a host for borrowed desires.

This is not distraction. It is **inhabitation**. The digital subject does not merely observe other lives. He *carries them within him*. He carries their desires, their ambitions, their aesthetics, their vocabularies. The borrowed identities do not sit on the surface—they colonize the interior. And because the subject's sight has been flattened, he cannot distinguish his own desires from the imported ones. The original "I"—the self created at the crossing point—is buried under accumulated personas. It is not destroyed. But it is *unreachable*. The person has become Legion: a plurality without a name, a multitude without a center.

Notice what Legion has lost. He has not lost intelligence—the demoniac is articulate, even eloquent. He has not lost awareness—he recognizes Jesus. He has not lost speech—he can name his condition with devastating precision. What he has lost is **singularity**. The capacity to say "I" and mean one thing. The capacity to stand at the crossing point as a single self and say "I am." His knowledge is present, but his presence is absent. He holds the correct propositions—he knows who Jesus is—but he cannot inhabit that knowledge as a unified agent. It slides off the surface of a self that is no longer there.

This is the Ghost Zone's deepest expression: **knowledge without traction**. The person can hold the correct moral propositions and still be unable to experience them as having weight, as making claims, as mattering. The Ghost Zone is the condition in which knowledge is present but presence is absent—and without presence, knowledge has no grip. Legion knows who Christ is. He cannot respond as a self, because the self has been scattered.

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V. The Developmental Root

Why is the "I" vulnerable to this dissolution in the first place? Why does the mimetic chain take hold?

The answer, as I argued in *The Topology of Presence*, is developmental. The Ghost Zone has a root, and the root is absence—specifically, the absence of presence during the formative years of a person's life. The parent who was in the room but not *there*. The caregiver who did not model what it means to inhabit the Now. Because no one was present at the crossing point, the child never learned that the crossing point exists. And because the child never experienced the "I am" modeled by another human being, the child's own "I" was never fully consolidated.

What the child builds instead is a compensatory architecture—a parallel interior universe, elaborated over years, populated by imagined selves and borrowed identities. This is the proto-Ghost Zone. In childhood, the materials were analog: imaginary friends, the tree house, the sports hero. In adulthood, the materials are digital: the influencer, the curated feed, the algorithm's endless supply of alternative lives. But the structure is the same. The person constructs a self from fragments because the self given at the crossing point was never received as real.

The mimetic chain, then, is not a modern invention. It is the **adult expression of a childhood wound**. The algorithm did not create the vulnerability. The absence did. The algorithm merely found, in the person whose "I" was never fully formed, a ready inhabitant for the serpent's curve—someone already habituated to living among borrowed identities, already accustomed to constructing a self from external materials, already unable to distinguish the given self from the assembled one.

This is why the mimetic chain is so difficult to break from within. The person who has never fully experienced the "I" at the crossing point does not know what they are missing. They do not experience the dissolution of the "I" as a loss, because the

"I" was never consolidated enough to be lost. They experience the mimetic chain as *normal*—as the way life is—because they have no experiential memory of an alternative. The serpent's curve feels like the only curve there is.

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VI. The Abandonment Without Opposition

What this essay denounces is not an instrument, not a company, not a platform. What it denounces is the **abandonment of the self without opposition**—the surrender of presence, of conscience, of the "I" that God creates, carried out not under coercion but in the absence of resistance. The micro-gap of agency—the infinitesimal space between the pull and the response, between the billboard and the exit—remains available at every moment. The person can still say no. The crossing point still holds. And yet the person does not oppose. The self is evacuated without protest. The "I" dissolves without a struggle.

The pattern is not new. It is as old as the Garden. Scripture records that "when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof and ate, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he ate" (Genesis 3:6). Notice the sequence. Eve does not deliberate. She does not rebel. She does not stand at the crossing point and choose against God in defiance. She ***sees***. Three presentations: good for food (appetite), pleasant to the eyes (aesthetics), desired to make one wise (aspiration). Three billboards on the serpent's curve. And then—without a recorded moment of resistance, without opposition, without a struggle—she took, and she ate, and she gave. The pseudo-lemniscate was already operating in Eden. The serpent did not need to overpower Eve's will. He needed only to *present*—to make the curve attractive enough that she stepped onto it. The micro-gap was there. She did not occupy it.

The First Extraction

The tradition has long asked what the fruit was—apple, fig, or otherwise. But the narrative does not sustain that question. The fruit is not specified because the object is not the point. The structure is.

The tree stands at the center. It marks the place of encounter—the crossing point where God is present, where the "I am" is given, where being is received rather than constructed. The prohibition is not about a substance but about a relation to that center.

What is forbidden is not consumption, but extraction.

When the woman takes the fruit, she does not merely disobey. She performs a displacement. She takes from the center what can only be received within it. She converts presence into object, gift into possession, encounter into acquisition. The act is topological: it is the first movement off the crossing point onto the serpent's curve.

The fruit is the form this movement takes. It is the visible remainder of an invisible shift—from being given to taking, from inhabiting to appropriating, from "I am" to "I will be."

Every absorption since has followed the same structure. The mimetic chain does not ask for consent. It does not demand a moment of reckoning. It simply *presents*—endlessly, frictionlessly—and the person absorbs without choosing, consumes without deciding, drifts without noticing that the drift has begun. The micro-gap is still there, but no one occupies it. Agency is available, but no one exercises it. The serpent's curve triumphs not because it overpowers the will but because **the will is never engaged**.

The result is not a dramatic rebellion against God. It is something quieter and more complete: the gradual dissolution of the self that would need to rebel or to repent. The "I" that God creates—the singular self at the crossing point, endowed with free will and the capacity for presence—is not attacked. It is *abandoned*. Left

uninhabited. The person walks away from the center not in defiance but in distraction, not in revolt but in absorption, not because they chose against God but because they ceased to choose at all.

This is the final form of the serpent's curve: not the dramatic fall of a soul that knew what it was rejecting, but the quiet dissolution of a soul that never learned what it possessed. A self so distributed across the mimetic chain that it has no location, no center, no crossing point from which to say "I am." The serpent promised transcendence. What it delivered is the most complete form of displacement: not a god, not a rebel, not even a sinner in the traditional sense—but a *ghost*. A presence without presence. A being that *is* but does not *inhabit*. Legion.

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VII. The Other as a Vector of Displacement

The displacement from the crossing point does not occur only through time—through memory of the past or anxiety about the future. It also occurs through relation.

The other, in its proper form, is the site of encounter. It is at the crossing point that one truly meets another, not as an image, not as a comparison, but as a presence. But when the self is not centered, the other becomes a vector of displacement. Attention is drawn outward—not toward encounter, but toward evaluation, concern, correction, imitation.

The other becomes a measure, a demand, a mirror.

This structure is already visible in the Gospel. Martha is not only occupied with many things. She is occupied with Mary. Her disturbance is not simply activity—it is relation displaced from presence. "Tell her to help me." The attention has shifted from the center to the other, not in encounter, but in regulation.

The issue is not the presence of the other. It is the absence of the center from which the other can be encountered.

VIII. The Restoration of the Center

> *"And they came to Jesus, and saw the one who had been demon-possessed sitting there, clothed and in his right mind."*
>
> — Mark 5:15

The theological task is not to condemn technology. Technology, in its healthy form, accelerates creativity and expands human capacity. The task is to **restore the center**—to remind the subject that the "I" is not a construction but a creation, that identity is not assembled from fragments but received as a gift, that presence is not a performance but a location.

This restoration cannot be achieved from within the serpent's curve. The person on the serpent's curve cannot, by their own effort, jump to the lemniscate's crossing point. This is the topological impossibility at the heart of the Ghost Zone: you cannot pull yourself back to the center from a trajectory that has no path to the center. Self-help, self-improvement, self-optimization—these are movements *along* the serpent's curve, not movements *off* it. They may refine the drift, but they do not restore the crossing.

In the state of grace—*in statu gratiae*—the center holds. God cannot be displaced from the crossing point by any force external to the person's free will. The serpent's curve cannot storm the center. It can only lure the person away from it. And this means that the center, even for the person deepest in the Ghost Zone, has not been destroyed. It has not been withdrawn. The crossing point is ontologically real even when the person cannot inhabit it. The topology holds even when the person is lost on the serpent's curve.

This is why Legion is healed not by self-integration but by **encounter**. The scattered selves are not gathered by an act of will. They are gathered by a presence that the Ghost Zone cannot fabricate and the serpent's curve cannot simulate.

When Christ heals Legion, the man is found “sitting there, clothed and in his right mind.” Three things have changed. He is *sitting*—no longer in motion, no longer drifting along the serpent’s curve. He is *clothed*—no longer exposed, no longer performing, no longer assembled from borrowed fragments. He is *in his right mind*—singular, present, integrated. The “I” has been returned to the crossing point. The many have been expelled. The self that God created—the irreducible “I” that participates in the divine “I am”—has been restored.

And the serpent’s curve is broken.

Not because the serpent has been destroyed — the serpent continues to crawl, to loop, to mimic the movement of the lemniscate. But the person is no longer on it. The person has been returned to the only geometry that passes through the center. The lemniscate. The topology of presence. The place where the "I" was first given, and where it is given again.

The restoration of the center is not the construction of a new self, nor the refinement of the scattered fragments. It is the return to the point where the self was always given.

Not deferred.
Not assembled.
Not borrowed.
No compared.
Not projected into a future that never arrives.

I am — because I was given.

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